

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LUSAKA 00356 051422Z

43

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINGS, RH, ZA

SUBJECT: ARREST OF ZANU LEADER NDABANINGI SITHOLE

REF: LONDON 03278

1. SUMMARY: ZAMBIAN PRESS DOMINATED THIS MORNING
BY SITHOLE ARREST AND MUZOREWA ASSERTION THERE WILL
BE NO FURTHER TALKS WITH SMITH REGIME UNTIL SITHOLE
RELEASED. STATE HOUSE SPOKESMAN CONDEMNS ARREST
AND LOCAL PRESS WARNS THIS ACTION COULD LEAD TO
RESUMPTION OF ARMED STRUGGLE. IF SITHOLE DETENTION
UPHELD BY RHODESIAN COURT, ANC AND ITS AFRICAN
SUPPORTERS WILL BE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM
ZANU TO REOPEN FIGHTING. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 LUSAKA 00356 051422Z

2. ZAMBIAN PRESS MARCH 5 CARRIES TEXT OF RHODESIAN GOVERNMENT STATEMENT BROADCAST PREVIOUS DAY RE SITHOLE ARREST UNDER EMERGENCY POWERS ACT. SITHOLE CHARGED WITH PLOTTING ASSASSINATION OF CERTAIN OF HIS OPPONENTS WHO MIGHT CHALLENGE HIS BID FOR LEADERSHIP OF ANC. STATEMENT ADDS THAT SPECIAL COURT WILL BE ESTABLISHED UNDER ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE TO DETERMINE IN CAMERA WHETHER SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE EXISTS FOR SITHOLE BE RETURNED TO DETENTION. FURTHER IMPLIES THAT SOME OF EVIDENCE AGAINST SITHOLE WILL COME FROM WITNESSES WHOSE IDENTITY CANNOT BE REVEALED EITHER FOR SECURITY REASONS OR FROM FEAR OF VICTIMIZATION.

3. PRESS REPORTS ANC LEADERS IN SALISBURY REACTED TO SITHOLE ARREST BY ANNOUNCING THEY WILL HOLD NO FURTHER TALKS WITH SMITH REGIME UNTIL HIS RELEASE. MOREOVER, ACCORDING TO STATEMENT RELEASED MARCH 4 BY BISHOP MUZOREWA, ANC WILL NOT IN FUTURE HOLD TALKS WITH RHODESIAN AUTHORITIES OR ATTEND CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE IF ANY OTHER OF ITS MEMBERS ARE DETAINED WITHOUT TRIAL. ZANU'S ROBERT MUGABE, IN SEPARATE STATEMENT, SAID THAT ZANU ELEMENT WITHIN ANC WILL NOT CONTINUE CONSTITUTIONAL DISCUSSIONS UNTIL ITS LEADER IS RELEASED. MUGABE ADDED THAT IN ZANU'S VIEW CURRENT CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS WERE "TOTAL WASTE OF TIME" AND SAID ZANU WOULD HAVE NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH THEM. ZANU WILL ALSO URGE OTHER GROUPS IN ANC TO DESIST FROM ANY CONTACTS WITH SMITH REGIME. ANC SOURCES IN LUSAKA (APPARENTLY PRO-ZANU) ARE ALSO QUOTED AS WARNING THAT ARREST WILL NOT ONLY MAKE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IMPOSSIBLE BUT WILL "NO DOUBT PROVOKE PEOPLE OF ZIMBABWE TO CONTINUE ARMED STRUGGLE WITH MORE DETERMINATION TO BITTER END." STATEMENT ADDS THAT ARREST WAS CLEARLY INTENDED TO REMOVE SITHOLE FROM POLITICAL SCENE TO PREVENT HIS PARTICIPATING IN ANC CONGRESS OR IN CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS.

4. IN LUSAKA, STATE HOUSE SPOKESMAN ON MARCH 4 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LUSAKA 00356 051422Z

DESCRIBED SITHOLE ARREST AS "UNWARRANTED" AND AS DELIBERATE ACT AIMED AT SABOTAGING EFFORTS BY ANC LEADERS TO FORGE UNIFIED POSITION. HE ADDED: "NO AMOUNT OF BRUTALITY OR CHICANERY WILL STOP FORCES OF LIBERATION NOW GATHERING SPEED IN THE COLONY FROM ACHIEVING MAJORITY RULE."

5. COMMENTING ON ARREST, TIMES OF ZAMBIA EDITORIAL

CALLED SMITH'S REASON FOR DETAINING SITHOLE "WILDLY IMPROBABLE AND ALMOST LAUGHABLE," THE TRAGEDY BEING THAT SMITH DOES NOT APPRECIATE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES. "IT TRUE SITHOLE HAS NOT ENDEARED HIMSELF AS A REPENTANT AND REFORMED AFRICAN SINCE HIS RELEASE. HE HAS NOT BEEN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE CHANCES FOR A SETTLEMENT, BUT HE HAS BEEN RIGHT ALL ALONG. GIVEN THE UTTER UNTRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE SMITH REGIME HIS HAS BEEN A REASONABLE POLITICAL STANCE...SMITH IS HOPING BY REMOVAL OF SITHOLE TO STRIKE A BARGAIN WITH ANC MODERATES, BUT HE IS WRONG." IN TIMES VIEW, FIGHTING IS "ALMOST CERTAIN TO BE RESUMED" AND, IF IT IS, "THE CHANCES OF ANY FRUTHER ATTEMPTS AT SOLUTION WILL RECEED BEYOND SIGHT." DAILY MAIL EDITORIAL ASSERTS SITHOLE ARREST "A SAVAGE AND COWARDLY KDT," PART OF A CAREFUL PLOT TO DIVIDE THE AFRICAN PEOPLE. "THERE NO CIVILIZED NATION IN WORLD WHICH WILL ARREST AND DETAIN A MAN ON THE GROUNDS IT HAS INFORMATION AND NOT EVIDENCE OF WHAT A PERSON IS SUPPOSED TO DO. IT IS A DANGEROUS MOVE AND POSSIBLY COUNTER PRODUCTIVE, IF ITS PURPOSE IS TO INFURIATE THE ANC INTO ABANDONING FURTHER TALKS OR TO PANDER TO ZANU ELEMENTS WHO WANT SITHOLE REMOVED FROM THE LEADERSHIP."

6. PRESS ALSO CARRIES UK FOREIGN OFFICE SPOKESMAN'S EXPRESSION OF DISAPPOINTMENT AT THIS DEVELOPMENT.

7. COMMENT: LIKE FOREIGN OFFICE (REFTEL), UK HIGH COMMISSION HERE HAD NO FURTHER INFORMATION THIS MORN-
ING ABOUT SITHOLE ARREST OR ALLEGED PLOT TO
ASSASSINATE HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS. WHILE WE
IN NO POSITION HERE TO JUDGE VALIDITY OF RHODESIAN
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PAGE 04 LUSAKA 00356 051422Z

GOVERNMENT CHARGES AGAINST SITHOLE, THERE
SEEMS LITTLE QUESTION BUT THAT ITS ACTION IN DETAIN-
ING HIM WILL BRING CURRENT TALKS BETWEEN ANC AND
SMITH TO DEAD HALT. WHILE RHODESIAN AUTHORITIES
MAY POSSIBLY HAVE CALUCLATED DETENTION OF SITHOLE
ON THESE CHARGES WOULDS SOW FURTHER SEEDS OF DISCORD
AMONG ANC LEADERS, IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCE IS MORE
LIKELY BE DEMONSTRATION OF LIBERATION LEADERS'
SOLIDARITY WITH SITHOLE. IF RHODESIAN COURT
UPHOLDS DETENTION, PRESSURES FROM ZANU MILITANTS
FOR REOPENING ARMED STRUGGLE WILL LIKELY INCREASE
AND COULD REACH POINT WHERE KAUNDA AND OTHER AFRICAN
LEADERS WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO WITHHOLD THEIR
CONSENT AND COOPERATION. BEFORE EVENTS REACH THAT
STAGE, HOWEVER, BELIEVE AFRICAN PRESIDENTS

ARE LIKELY MAKE ATTEMPT THROUGH SOUTH AFRICAN
PREMIER VORSTER TO BRING PRESSURE ON SMITH TO
RELEASE SITHOLE.
NELSON

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